

Extreme sports and other activities in tourism with special regard to the Mátra Mountain

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Abstract

When we examine extremities in tourism we study such branches of the tourism industry where the main motivations of the traveller are risk taking, yearning for excitement and adventure. In these cases we can observe the yearning for adventure and every other motivation, which are judged to be extreme from the views of points of aesthetics, legal and moral—but not considered as negative examples. In our overview we are going to examine some of the most important trends and phenomena that are actually appearing on the globalizing tourism market with special regard to adventure tourism activities. The second part of the study gives a review about adventure tourism in a mountain of Hungary explaining the importance of the special-interest tourism.

Key words: sport activities, active tourism, adventure tourism, sport activities, Mátra Mountain

Introduction

Tourism market can be divided into seven main parts which belong to mass tourism, active tourism and a narrow segment related to academic sphere (Internet 1.). According to the official website of Active Tourism it is a special way to spend vacations furthermore a new travelling philosophy combining adventure, ecotourism and cultural aspects of a discovery tour (Figure 1). Active tourism is small scale and has low-impact in its environment. This type of tourism is ecological and socially sustainable (Dávid et al. 2012). Active Tourism not only values nature, but it also aims to educate the human being, culturally and ecologically (Dávid and Mátraházi, 2004).

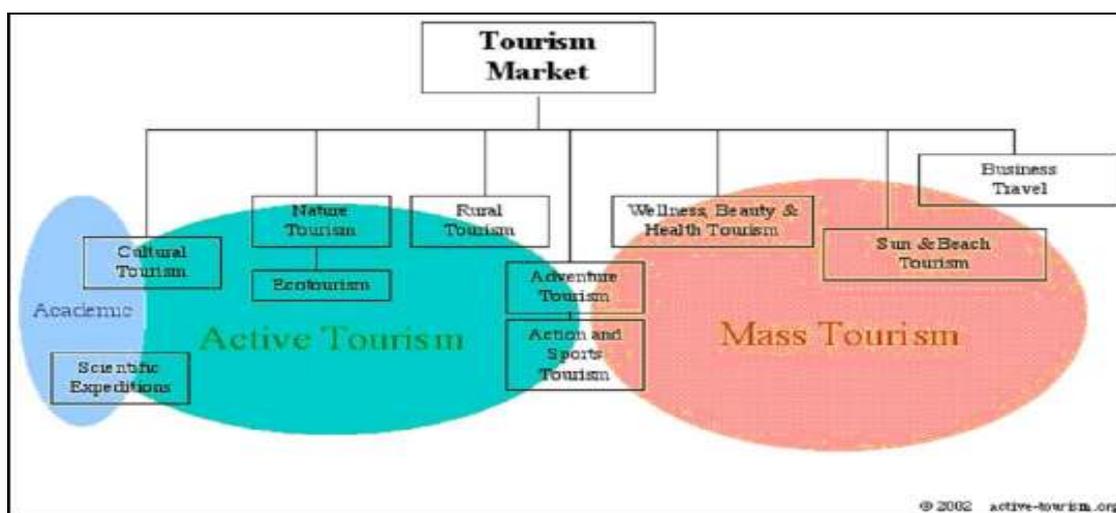


Figure 1. Distribution of tourism market

Source : Internet 1

Active tourism has three major aims (Figure 2).

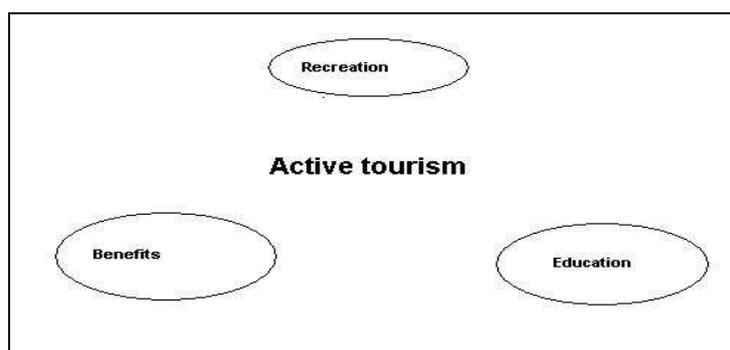


Figure 2. The segments of active tourism
Source: own edition after Internet 1.

Active tourism should not be confused with action Tourism, which involves many sports activities like mountain bike, cross country rally, speed boat riding, bungee jumping and extreme sports, many of these activities are already offered as part of mass tourism infrastructure. (Internet 1).

According to Buckley the main motivation is excitement and amusement very often, some of the activities involve high personal risks and dangers (Buckley 2006). Risk and danger relate to a potential for injury and loss.

Travel Industry Dictionary define adventure tourism as recreational travel undertaken to remote or exotic destinations for the purpose of exploration or engaging in a variety of rugged activities (Internet 2) while Kane and Tucker say that adventure tourism is a type of niche tourism involving exploration or travel to remote areas, where the traveler should expect the unexpected. Adventure tourism is rapidly growing in popularity as tourists seek unusual holidays, different from the typical beach vacation (Kane and Tucker 2004).

In adventure tourism the tourist is involved in the activities much more than more traditional types of tourism where the traveller can be just a passive observer. The physical requirements and the need for mental concentration are also greater. Adventure tourism has become a huge business where large companies dominate the market, although some smaller specialized companies also found their niche markets (Dreyer and Krager 1997, Takács-György and Kis 2010).

However, there are major disadvantages caused by adventure tourism. There is a considerable environmental damage caused by some of the above-mentioned activities, erosion from mountain-bikes and skis, pollution and rubbish left by expeditions and the disturbance of some local communities by insensitive thrill seekers with adrenalin withdrawal symptoms (Magda and Bozsik 2010). It is very clear that in adventure tourism too the participants must adhere to the principles of sustainable tourism development.

Types of adventure tourism

In many parts of the world there has been a considerable increase in the number tourists seeking thrill and adventure in their destination, especially among North-American tourists but to a certain degree in the case of Japanese and Western European travellers as well. Apart from the young, independent male travellers there is also a growth of adventure seekers among the mature-aged and women tourists.

It is more common that men participate in more dangerous, so-called 'hard adventure' than women, while the latter is represented in greater numbers in the so-called 'soft adventure' activities. If we look at age groups, predictably the most adventurous are the young people between 18 to 25 years old. As far as the types of activities are concerned, the following gender based differences would we find: horse riding and sailing are more popular among females while males prefer faster, more thrilling activities (Hall and Stephen 1999). Seekers of the 'hard adventure' type are bigger spenders as well.

The bigger the thrill the bigger the expenses are. The most common motivators for adventure travel are thrill seeking, the challenge of learning and experiencing and complying with peer pressure (Jennings 2007).

There are 5 major fields and branches of adventure tourism based on five different geographical settings (Figure 3). Thus, tourism operators can run adventure tours and activities in the deserts of the arid areas of the world, in and on the seas surrounding the mainland, in the extreme climate polar regions, in the various mountains in every continent and in the jungles and rainforests of the tropical zones (Hudson 2003).

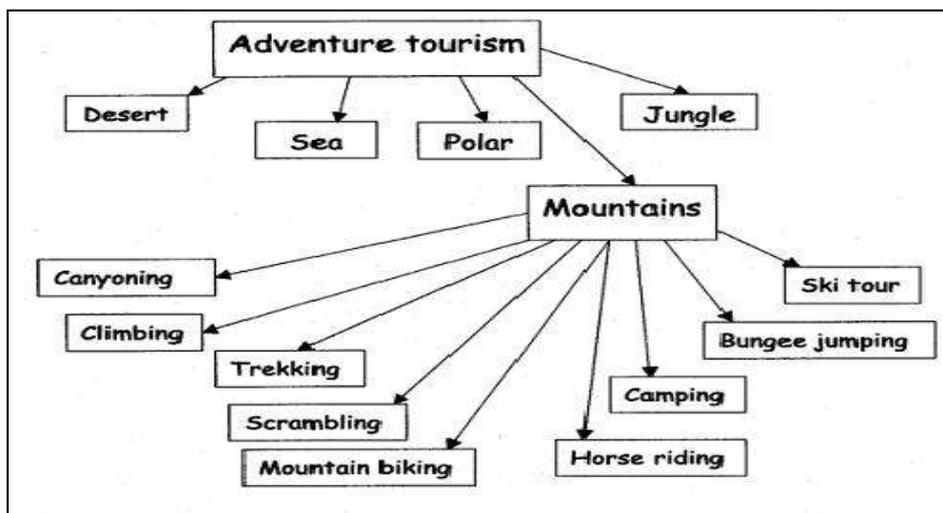


Figure 3. The main fields and branches of adventure tourism (Hudson 2003.)

Adventures in the mountains: Mountains have always been one of the world's most important tourist destinations since the development of tourism. The Alps, for example, is considered the birthplace of tourism. The towering summits and magnificent landscapes continue to become more and more popular as places of escape in a stressful, urbanized world. But tourism presents both opportunities and dangers for mountain regions, just like in other natural environments. The invasion of adventure seekers into mountain regions poses a threat to these unique and often pristine environments.

Income from tourism has become a primary source of revenue for many mountain communities. Yet although tourism - and mountain tourism in particular - is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world, it is also one of the least regulated. Short-term profits need to be balanced against long-term losses if the industry is to become a lasting source of benefit for mountain people. The balance between economic benefits and the sustainable development thus must be carefully monitored. (Dávid 2002)

Approximately 50 million tourists visit the mountains of the world every year. Many types of recreation and adventure are available in mountainous terrain, such as trekking, abseiling, climbing, skiing or just watching the birds soaring among the peaks of the ranges. There has been a spectacular growth in sport-based tourism in mountain regions over the past 30 years. It has expanded from the traditional areas of North America and the European Alps to largely untouched mountain regions, including parts of Central Asia, the Himalaya, Karakorum, Caucasus, Andes and even Antarctica. However, extreme sports, such as bungee jumping, hydro speeding, rafting, paragliding and canyoning are becoming increasingly popular, especially with affluent urban thrill-seekers.

The large number of tourists in fragile mountain ecosystems can cause a scale of harmful effects to the environment. Damages can also be done to the cultural life of mountainous areas that often serve as sacred sights for the various religions of the world.

Methodology

Data collection data were collected from institutions (offices of local governments, the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, institutional statistics)

In 2010 a survey was conducted with 250 respondents. The aims of this research were to gain information about the popularity and active tourism possibilities of the 10 well-known mountains of Hungary. The studied mountains were the following: Aggteleki Mountain, Bakony Mountain, Börzsöny Mountain, Budai Mountain, Bükk Mountain, Mátra Mountain, Mecsek Mountain, Villányi Mountain, Visegrádi Mountain, Zemplén Mountain (Figure 4).

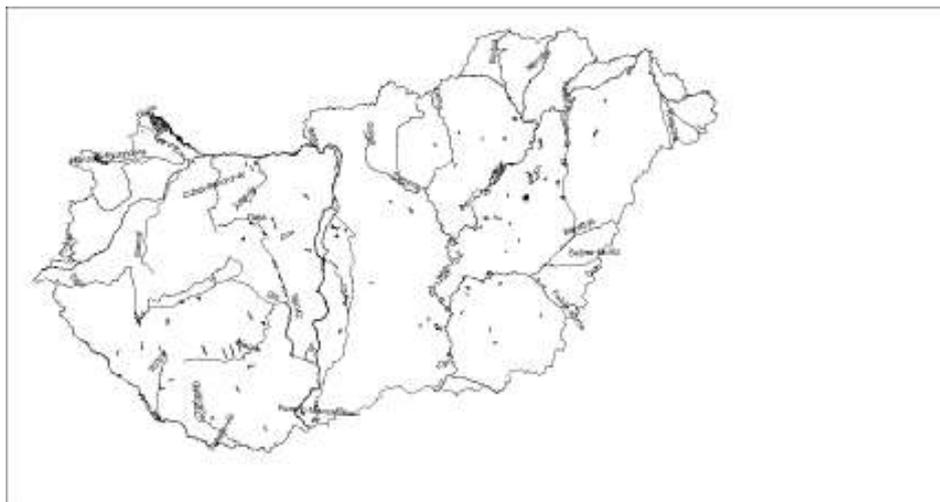


Figure 4. The studied mountains

The survey covered nine groups of questions among others the general popularity, the appeal, symbols, the level of services or the uniqueness of the destinations.

Results

Mountain tourism can basically be treated as a site specific tourism product since it is linked to a geographically well-defined area – i.e. mountains. Another important feature of it is that it specifically comprises of a set of activities in a natural environment. The classification and definition of site specific tourism products on the basis of their relation to the natural environment is of utmost importance.

The Mátra Mountain is blessed with a wealth of tourist attractions. Its natural conditions feature the highest point of Hungary (Kékes-tető 1014 m), as well as the most significant recreational and health resorts. Historic sites and monuments include fortresses, castles, museums, country houses, and exhibitions. The Historical Wine Region of Mátraalja is the second largest of the 22 wine regions in the country and the largest one among the wine regions situated in mountain areas. The best examples of the utilisation of the region's thermal and medicinal waters for medical purposes are the spas of Parádszék and Bükköszék. The forests in the Mátra are widely used by hunters. Natural and eco-tourism enthusiasts will find ideal conditions in any season in the Mátra Conservation Area while those who favour sports can try the ski tracks and forest paths. All conditions are given for both road cycling and mountain biking in the Mátra Mountains. Rural tourism (village and agro tourism) also has high potentials as there are a number of beautiful settlements, unique traditions and lifestyle, trades and crafts, architecture, and folk culture present in the area. Respondents named the following sport activities and facilities available in the area (Table 1.)

Table 1: Sport activities and facilities available in the area

Skying
Extrem sports (paragliding, mountain biking)
Climbing
Trecking
Spelunking
Bob sliding
Snowbord
Bicycle
Horse riding
Ice skating

In our survey we tried to find answers to different sets of questions the most of which are summarised in this paper. On the basis of the survey on whether people know of a mountain it can be stated that none of the examined mountains are outstandingly well known. Even the Mátra, which is thought to be the best known mountain, has a mere 3,62 popularity index (Figure 5).

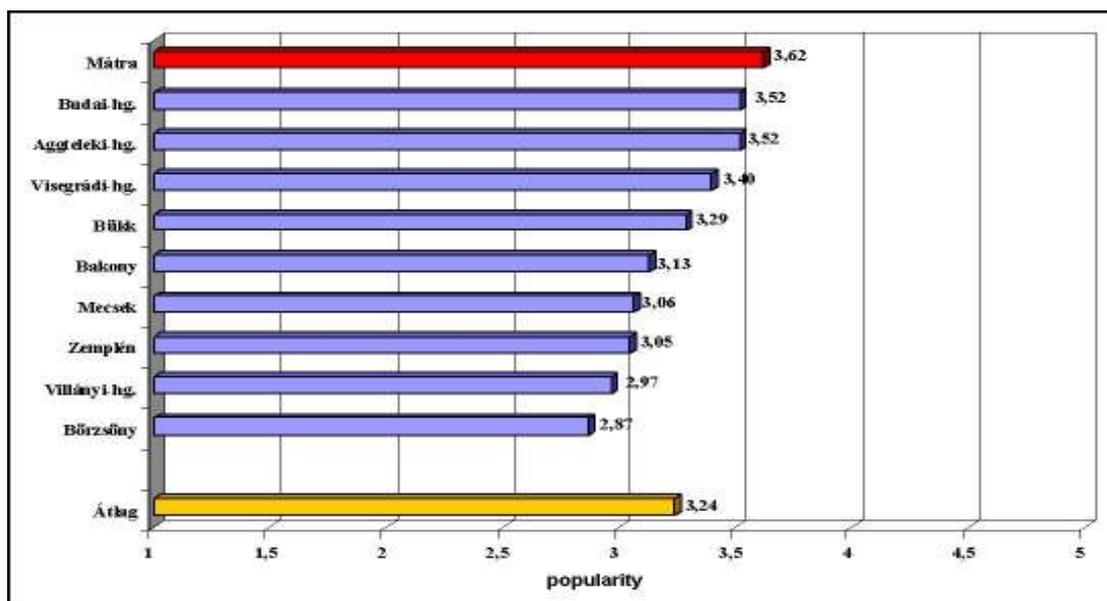


Figure 5. Popularity of the 10 studied mountains among respondent (five-level scale, 1-I have never heard about it, 5-I know perfect) N=250

Data also reveals that the Mátra Mountain generates the greatest tourist attraction among the respondents (4,00), but there are other popular places such as the Aggtelek Mountain (3,82) and the Visegrád Mountains (3,71) (Figure 6).

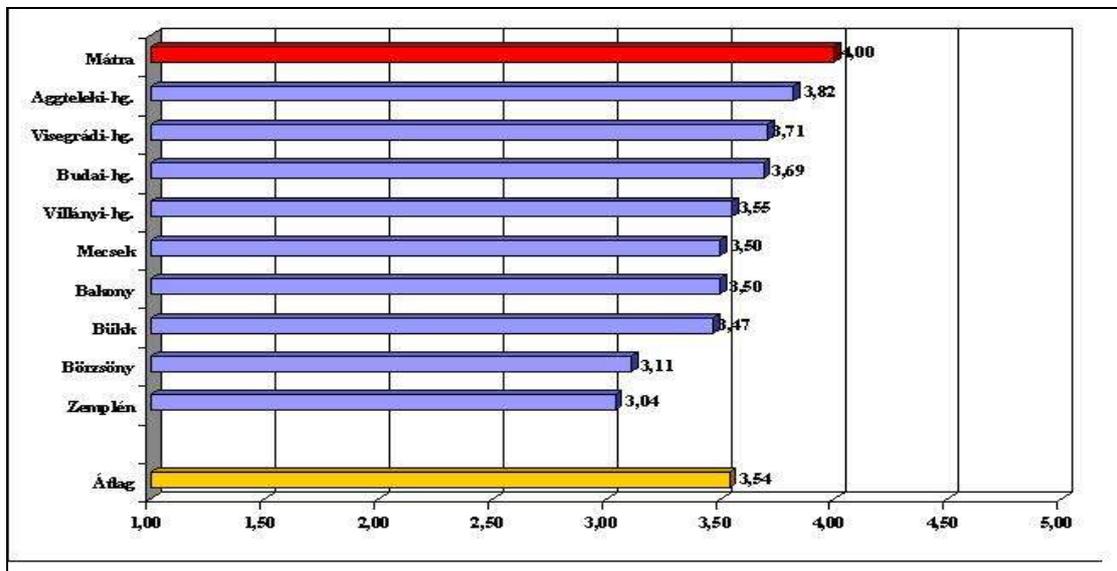


Figure 6. Tourist attractions of the 10 studied mountains among respondent (five-level scale, 1= not worth visiting it, 5= very attractive area) N=250

In the following we will succinctly present the most suitable target groups for the examined tourist areas. The table clearly shows that mountains are primarily popular with those who seek peaceful recreation, relaxation, pleasant environment, and also with sports enthusiasts (Table 2).

Table 2: The most suitable target groups for the examined tourist areas

Mountain	the most suitable target groups for the examined tourist areas		
Mátra	Tourist seeking recreation, sport activities	Tourist seeking peaceful recreation, relaxation, pleasant environment	Family with children
Zemplén	Tourist seeking peaceful recreation, relaxation, pleasant environment	Ecotourists	Tourist seeking recreation, sport activities
Bükk	Tourist seeking recreation, sport activities	Ecotourists	Tourist seeking peaceful recreation, relaxation, pleasant environment
Aggteleki-hg.	Ecotourists	Special interest tourists	Tourist seeking peaceful recreation, relaxation, pleasant environment
Börzsöny	Tourist seeking peaceful recreation, relaxation, pleasant environment	Ecotourists	Tourist seeking recreation, sport activities
Budai-hg.	Family with children	Young pairs	Tourist seeking recreation, sport activities
Visegrádi hg.	Family with children	Ecotourists	Tourist seeking recreation, sport activities
Bakony	Ecotourists	Tourist seeking recreation, sport activities	Tourist seeking peaceful recreation, relaxation, pleasant environment
Mecsek	Ecotourists	Tourist seeking peaceful recreation, relaxation, pleasant environment	Tourist seeking recreation, sport activities
Villányi-hg.	Singles	Senior guests	Special interest tourists

In order to be able to determine the distinguishing features and uniqueness of the examined areas we asked the respondents to select symbols and concepts that best describe the given region. According to the respondents the following notions are linked to the Mátra: ski track, fresh air, sanatorium, and extreme sports.

Discussion

Our survey clearly reveals that tourism, more precisely active and sport tourism has a determining role in the Mátra Mountains. Areas with a unified image and symbolic significance have a growing role in tourism. The Mátra Mountains are one of the best known geographical units in Hungary which locals take advantage of. As a result of mixing Mátra as a trade-name with the dominant image components (mountains, Kékestető, active lifestyle, sport, grape and wine) as well as sensible product development and image-building the area has by now become popular in the tourism market. The most important tourism products can be linked to them as well. These are the features that the Mátra is popular for and liked. The basic condition for a successful product development is the local citizens' sense of identity linked to the Mátra as well as the utilisation of the cultural values of the past. However, the new challenges of the present and the future cannot do without the consideration of the integrated planning tools and goals considering the tourism season and also the use of suitable symbol systems. The latter poses the greatest challenge for the participants of active tourism.

Conclusion

Some of the people seek recreation during their holidays. They would like to have a change, albeit for a short period, from their urban life-style to some sort of activity. The spectacular growth of adventure tourism and extreme sports is a worldwide phenomenon. We can experience its forms and types, its beauty and dangers. Adventure tourism serves the individual by providing thrilling and refreshing recreation. It is, however, a very complex industry, as, for example, even companies give out adventure holiday bonuses as part of their incentive program. Their employees can experience different, exciting and unusual programs at exotic destinations. Adventure and extreme tourism combines travelling, sporting challenges and outdoor activities. The locality of adventure tourism can be on different bodies of water such as rapids of creeks, lakes and the wild surfs of the oceans. However, the most popular locations for adventure tourism are found in the wild mountains of the world. Its origins can be found in rock climbing and mountaineering expeditions and polar explorations. Some examples of mountain based adventure tourism are: trekking the Himalayas, climbing in the South of Chile, abseiling inside waterfalls and riding mountain bikes on hilly terrain. The site of airborne adventures such as parasailing, paragliding and base-jumping are also often found in mountainous areas. Skiing and snowboarding are, of course, the winter examples of mountain tourism.

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